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Congressman Dent hails new initiative to speed development of hydrogen as a fuel source

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Rep. Charlie Dent (PA-15), a founding co-chair of the House Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Caucus, today praised creation of a new initiative, the H-Prize, to prompt American private-sector development of hydrogen as a fuel source to replace fossil fuels. The bill to start the program passed overwhelmingly, 416 to 6.

The H-Prize Act of 2006 authorizes \$11 million in annual appropriations and is modeled on science competitions of the past that proved to be highly successful, such as the Ansari X Prize, which spurred the first privately funded suborbital human spaceflight last year. Congressman Dent pushed for the enabling legislation, HR 5143, on the House floor on Wednesday.

“Today, in an era of rising fuel costs, the drive to produce energy economically can be advanced through American innovation and competition,” Congressman Dent said. “Fossil fuel technology was the impetus for 20th century industrial development, but today hydrogen holds out the promise of being the driver for the economy of the future. And of course, hydrogen is a fuel that can be produced domestically, thus limiting our dependence on foreign petroleum products.”

The H-Prize competition establishes four \$1 million prizes (awarded every other year) for the best advancements in hydrogen production, storage, distribution, and utilization. It authorizes an additional \$1 million to that person or group that develops a superior hydrogen-powered vehicle or other hydrogen-based products. And it establishes a minimum lump sum \$10 million prize award for the best transformational changes in technologies for the production and distribution of hydrogen.

Bill Highlights

- The H-Prize Act of 2006 establishes a prize competition to encourage the development of breakthrough technologies that would make hydrogen a practical alternative to oil in our transportation sector.
- The H-Prize, modeled after the successful Ansari X Prize – which spurred the first privately funded suborbital human spaceflight last year – would help overcome technical challenges related to hydrogen by offering prizes in three categories:
 - Technological Advancements – Four prizes of up to \$1 million awarded biennially in the categories of hydrogen Production, Storage, Distribution and Utilization;
 - Prototypes – One prize of up to \$4 million awarded biennially that forces working hydrogen vehicle prototypes to meet ambitious performance goals; and
 - Transformational Technologies – One grand prize consisting of a \$10 million cash award, funded in whole or in part by federal contribution. Additional matching funds could be awarded for development of wells-to-wheels breakthrough technologies.
- H.R. 5143 would authorize appropriations during fiscal years 2007 through 2016 totaling:
 - \$20 million for the Technical Advancement prizes;
 - \$20 million for the Prototypes prizes (awards in these two categories alternate each year);
 - \$10 million for a single Transformational Technologies grand prize; and
 - \$2 million annually for administrative and advertising costs.
- The legislation would also direct the Secretary of Energy to contract with a private foundation or panel that would include experts in the field to establish criteria for the prizes and administer the prize contest. The authority to announce prize competitions sunsets in 2017.

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